

P Z

3

F417A

FT MEADE
GenColl

Across the Threshold



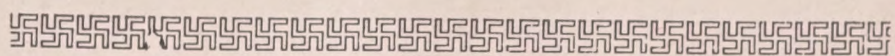


Class PZ3

Book F417A

Copyright N^o _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



"Oh, Manito, maker of all things"

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD



COPYRIGHT 1914
H. W. HICKS

NOV 24 1914

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD



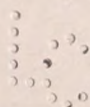
By

Anita B. Ferris

11

Reprint from Everyland,
September, 1914

1914



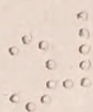
MISSIONARY EDUCATION
MOVEMENT

New York City

PZ 3

F 417

A



\$ 0.25

© Cl. A 387654

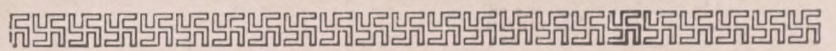
no 1

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD



As the first golden light of the approaching sun mellowed the morning sky, Os-seo-o stirred from his rigid position against the trunk of the blasted pine on the lonely peak of Thunder Mountain. At his feet still slept the half grown bear, Mokwa, his pet.

Naked stood Osseo, save for his clout and moccasins. His limbs were cold and stiff, for he had held his vigil faithfully all through the chill spring night. To-day he would cross the threshold of manhood. Yesterday, midway between his fifteenth and sixteenth years, he had been received into the Council tent together with his former playmate, Wanda. The wise men of the tribe had talked to them

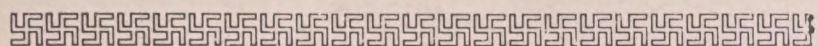


of their physical manhood. They had told them of the laws of health, whispered to them the secrets of the braves to be kept forever sacred, lectured them on tribal law and intertribal law, and finally sent each forth alone to the bath of purification, and thence to his all-night vigil, and the solitary communion at sunrise of his spirit with the Great Mystery. .

Osseo had not tasted food for thirty-six hours, and as his eyes strained into the darkness through the long night, strange visions had flitted before them born of the fasting. He was to watch for some bird, beast, or reptile which visiting his dizzy fancy then would forever after come to him in time of trial and aid him. This would be his personal totem known as his only by all the tribe. In the birch bark writing, on ornament or quiver, this would be his sign.

The glory of the yet invisible sun crept farther up the sky. The shy woodland birds began to twitter. Mokwa stretched himself and grunted. Osseo climbed to the topmost crag

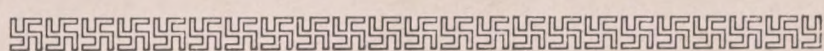




and waited, his young form straight as an arrow, outlined against the brightening sky; his face to the East. With quickening breath he watched the brightest spot along the ridge of hills beyond. At last a rim of glowing, dazzling fire showed above the black outline. Higher and higher it climbed with every second. His throat swelling with exultation, Osseo raised his right arm straight above his head, the hand palm outward.

“Oh, Manito, maker of all things,” he chanted, “beautiful art thou, and wonderful; great art thou and all-powerful. Who can face thy brightness and yet see? The thunder is thine, and the swift darting light: ’tis thus that thou showest forth thy power.”

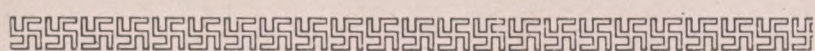
He paused. The whole mountain had waked to invisible life. The squirrels chattered and barked as they searched for their morning meal. A tiny myrtle warbler poured forth its clear notes in the spruce near by. Mokwa, sitting upon fat haunches by his side, swayed back and forth with



the motion of his kind. All these things Osseo saw and heard, though he moved not his eyes from the blue above.

"All are thy children," he continued, "both man and beast. All are brothers." Again he raised his hand. "My hands are clean, O Great Spirit; my heart is pure. I am a man this day. Give me a strong spirit. Help me to do some great thing. Give swiftness to my feet; give power to my bow. All that I do shall be thine, O thou Great Mystery, covering all the earth. This is my offering!" He stood for a moment, bathed in the warm spring sunlight, and then, turning quickly, followed the trail down the mountain, with swift, noiseless steps. Mokwa, though seemingly slow and clumsy, kept pace with him.

On the edge of the wigwams, the children met him and stared at him. Many a time had Osseo raced with them. Now he did not turn his head. He would never sport with children again, and none dared speak with him



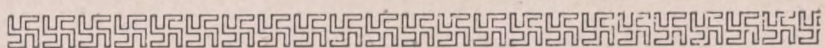
till he had a second time passed through the bath of purification.

Again he entered the Council tent and took his seat upon the floor. Near him Wanda already squatted. He also would cross the threshold into manhood that day. In a half circle before them sat the braves. In the center squatted the strong chief, So-an-geta-ha, and on his right smoked feeble old Meda, the oldest man in the village.

Soangetaha addressed them: "You have learned the laws of your body and of your spirit; we have told you the mysteries of your tribe. There is but one test more, the test of bravery. If captured by an enemy you must not turn fainthearted in the torture and bring disgrace upon your brothers. Pain you must despise. Manhood is not gained till you can prove this." With his last words the two youths were strung up to poles of the lodge, and the friendly torture with knife and burning splinter began.

Meanwhile, they were told of their enemies, and how to treat them when





captured. For the first time, a doubt of the wisdom of his elders crept into Osseo's mind. Had these braves never stood facing Manito alone on a mountain peak? Had they never felt at one with all life breathing and stirring about them—one with all men? At the height of the torture Wanda threw back his head and laughed, and the old men grunted their approval. Osseo did not change a muscle. 'Twas childish to laugh, he thought. Old Shuhgah, applying a burning splinter to a small wound, peered into his face. Was this youth a coward? To make sure he increased the pain; still no sound came from the proud lips of Osseo.

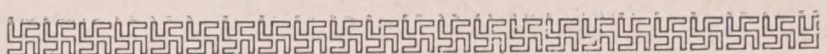
At last they were free, and praised for their hardihood.

Now came the steam bath at the mineral spring, with the hot stones thrown in to boil the water. There the strain relaxed, and they slept.

Next came the gantlet of the women and children, with their sticks. Wanda plunged through at once, but Osseo paused for a moment to glance at Blue



Soangetaha



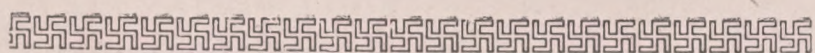
Flower. Old Shuhgah leaped forward. "Art afraid of the women and children?" he queried.

Osseo looked at him disdainfully, and then, with the swiftness of an arrow, he sped through the laughing, striking crowd, their whips beating the empty air behind him, and passing Wanda, he reached the Council tent first.

Earth and sky swam round together, when the strong hand of the chief Soangetaha guided the two boys into the Council tent. Cold water was dashed over their warm bodies, oil was applied, and food given them, the first they had tasted in forty-eight hours. Then were they given the apparel of men, trousers of buckskin, and a blanket of buffalo skin, carefully dressed. Soangetaha lifted the tent flap, and Osseo and Wanda crossed the threshold, men at last.

Straight to his mother's lone wigwam walked Osseo proudly, and soundly he slept that night against Mokwa's shaggy side.

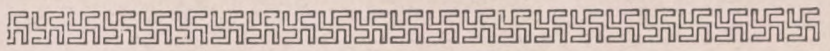
With the first light of morning, the mother wakened Osseo. "Up," she



said, "you are a man now. Provide a fine buck for the household." Eagerly Osseo rose, and with bow and quiver and Mokwa grunting by his side, hurried to the mountain.

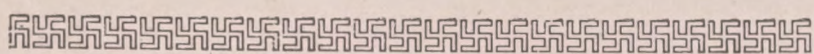
Once in the shady depths, he bade Mokwa lie down, and keenly scanning some fresh deer tracks, set off as noiseless as the flickering sunlight which danced over the brown leaves of last year, still under the trees. Once he stopped, and held up his hand, feeling the air fresh on the palm. On he went, his eyes on the tracks, till, suddenly he began to move slowly, to glide with the swiftness of a cat from one tree to another. In front of him was a thicket, and bending and twisting his way in, he saw before him what he had expected, a tall, fine buck, two does beside him, and a young fawn standing close to its mother. They were facing his way, with the wind, to guard against the danger they could not scent. With a proud motion of the head, the great buck faced him, his lustrous eyes wide and frank as a child's. By his side the doe, all un-





conscious of her danger, dropped her head low over her spotted fawn. Osseo's arrow pointed straight at the breast of the buck, where, beneath the velvet coat, the strong heart beat in fulness of life. The lustrous eyes gazed straight into the darkness of the thicket where Osseo's eyes gazed back. Slowly the boy relaxed his bow. "He is my brother, the beautiful one. He too, has reached his manhood," he whispered, and slipping backward as noiselessly as he had come, he retraced his steps to Mokwa.

Snapping his fingers at his pet, they started for a small mountain lake, Osseo's favorite fishing ground. From a hollow tree the lad drew out a slender spear and a scap-net cunningly woven of tough strips of bark lining. With quick, true aim, he speared or scapped the trout in the shallow lake, Mokwa watching with the greatest interest. At last there were enough, and merrily Osseo laughed as Mokwa standing on his hind legs, dexterously caught in his mouth the fish tossed to him, almost losing his balance when



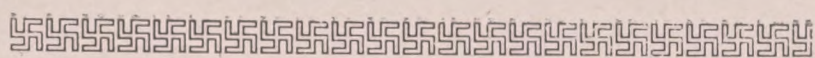
the boy purposely threw wide of the mark. With a few dry sticks Osseo kindled a fire and broiled over it his own meal from the lake.

The savory dinner over, Mokwa rolled himself into a ball, and slept. Osseo seated under a great beech, leaned his back against its trunk, his bow across his knees, one hand upon his quiver.

Gradually he became conscious of a presence. He and Mokwa were not alone in the forest. Slowly and casually he lifted his bow and loosened an arrow in the quiver. Then as slowly he turned his head, his eyes going straight as if drawn by a magnet to a great limb half way up the opposite beech. There, flattened along the branch, his round head hanging low between his shoulders, his glowing eyes burning down upon Osseo, lay a great panther. The lad gazed back unflinchingly, exerting all the power of his will, while slowly, with the skill and deception of a conjurer, he was fitting his arrow to his bow. The great breast lay protected by the





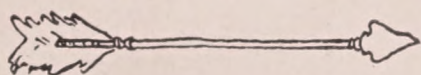


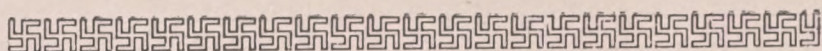
limb, the vital spot behind the shoulder he could not reach. The powerful hind quarters moved ever so slightly for a stronger hold upon the limb before the spring. Osseo raised his bow, and with lightning aim, sent the arrow speeding with all his strength into one of the glowing eyes. Instantly the great muscles relaxed, and with a dull thud, the powerful animal hit the ground, his strong limbs beating the air in the death agony.

“Osseo is stronger than his brother, the great cat,” the boy murmured. “In the contest he has won. He will take his brother’s coat,” and quickly and dexterously he began skinning the great animal.

Stringing the fish he had left on a slender crotched stick, and with the fresh pelt rolled into a ball and tucked under one arm, Osseo started for home.

At the edge of the village the children met him,—“Ho, brave Osseo,” they cried, “where is thy roebuck? Wanda hath a fat doe.” He strode on without replying to his tent, where his mother awaited him. “Where is thy

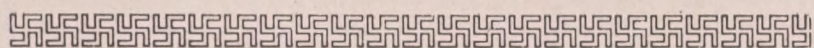




buck?" she cried. "How can I make a feast for thy manhood?—A string of fish, forsooth!" and she snatched them out of his hand in her anger and trampled them into the earth. "The mother of Wanda makes a great feast to-night. All the old men and the braves will praise the youths' skill, and you, lazy son, bring me some fish!" She followed Osseo into the tent, scolding afresh. Mokwa grunted as he pawed the fish out of the dust and dipping them into the water bucket, daintily ate them.

Osseo threw his panther skin sullenly upon the floor. His mother stopped short.—"What is this, my son?—the skin of the mountain cat?" she asked with awe, and spreading it out before her, gazed keenly at it. "Thy arrow pierced it through the eye," she continued wonderingly—"a marvel!" and scolded no more that night.

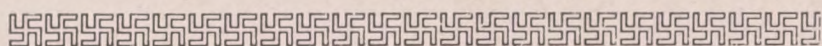
The next morning, while his mother and younger brother still slept, Osseo and his bear took the trail for the mountain. The spring was waking and pressing on every side. Osseo drank



in the fresh young odors, and at the edge of the village, raced with Mokwa up the steep trail. Above his head the gray squirrels leaped from limb to limb on their way to their feeding-ground. The robins and thrushes first called a sleepy note, then waked to full chorus. On the edge of the cliff the first columbine glowed. Far below he heard shouts. Creeping out on the rock, he looked down on the village.

The men were bringing in the horses. Two of the braves were running in excitement to the Council tent. Osseo began counting—fourteen, fifteen, sixteen—one of the horses was missing. Ah, now he understood the excitement. Some thieving Crow had helped himself. The war drum began to beat. Now the braves, all those who had crossed the threshold of manhood, were entering the Council tent. They were going to punish their neighbors. The drum still sounded, and Osseo's heart beat faster. He was about to leap down the path, when suddenly he paused. He could see it all. When he was ten years old his father had





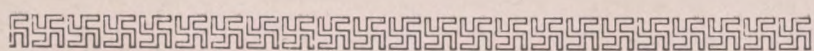
taken him on such a war expedition to keep the horses in the covert while the braves went to the battle. He had heard the cries and wild yells of the contest. A woman and small child had sped past him, trying to escape, but were caught and killed before his eyes. The men had returned in triumph, wearing many scalps, but they had borne among them also the still form of his father.

Down below him the war-whoop sounded. Out of the Council tent filed the men, their faces blackened with the war-paint, their tomahawks lifted. Round and round the war post they circled, striking it with their hatchets, then filed silently out into the forest.

Osseo drew a long breath. He would stay with the spring, with his brothers of the forest that day.

In the spring dusk, Osseo met Blue Flower on her way to the hollow for water. "I've looked for you all day," she said timidly. "I thought you hadn't heard the war drum and I wanted to tell you."

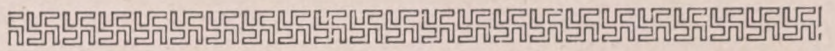




He looked at her as the wind blew the dark hair about her face. Perhaps she, too, had crossed a threshold. "I heard the drum," he answered simply. In the warm dusk Osseo strode homeward through the dry, rustling grass of last winter.

In the village all was commotion. The warriors had returned with horses and scalps, and there was a din of rejoicing. His teepee was the first on the trail from the mountain, and he met no one. In the tent his mother sat alone with her head in her hands. She spoke no word as he entered. This matter indeed was too grave for scolding. Osseo began to realize what he had done in disobeying the summons of the war drum. His youth would not be taken as excuse—he who had so bravely crossed the threshold of manhood but two short suns ago. He sat down on his couch of skins, one hand playing with Mokwa's shaggy hair and waited for the summons that was sure to come.

At last there was a slight sound, and Wanda lifted the tent flap and looked



disdainfully within—Wanda with the war paint still black upon his face, and a fresh, bloody scalp fastened conspicuously at his belt. The mother looked hopelessly at him.

“The chief, Soangetaha, bids Osseo come to the Council tent,” said Wanda shortly.

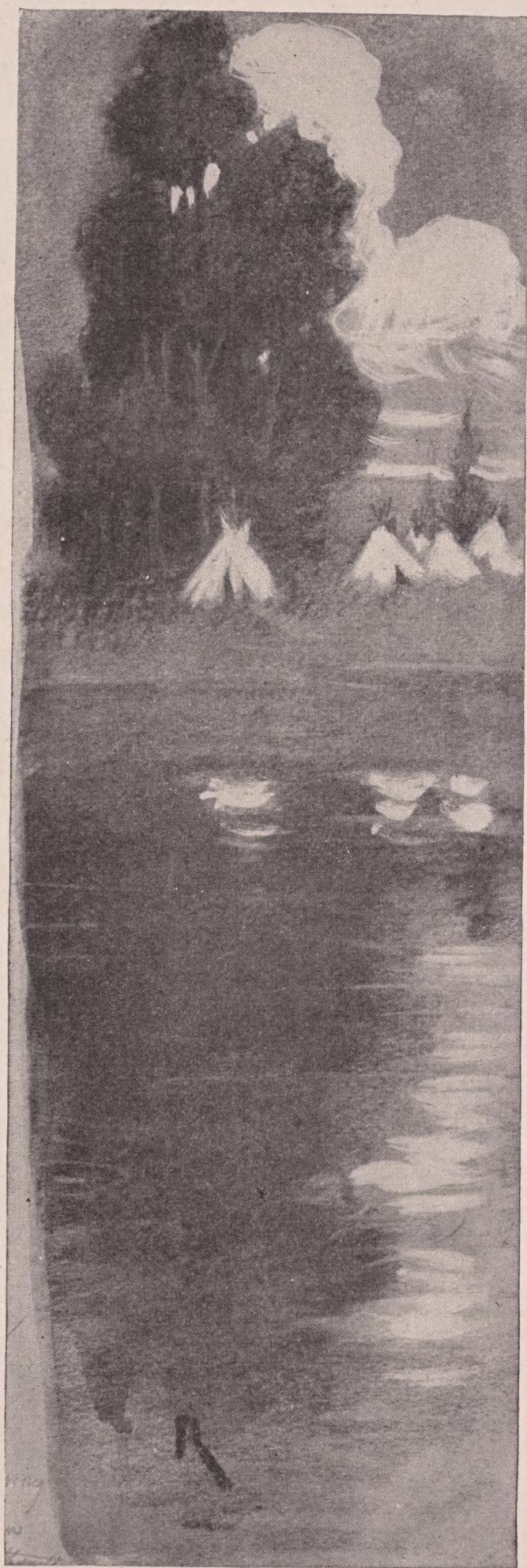
Osseo followed him in silence. Outside Wanda continued, “My friend’s ears hear not the war drum. He sleeps in the early morning like the children.”

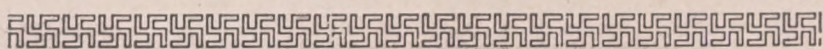
Osseo did not deign to answer.

“The thieving Crow need not fear his arrows,” he sneered. Then as they neared the great blazing fire in front of the Council tent, he snatched the scalp from his belt and dangling it before Osseo’s eyes in the bright light before all the women and children, he cried tauntingly, “Wanda has already beaten an enemy, and won a scalp in the first battle! Does the baby Osseo dare to look upon its blood?”

With a sudden movement Osseo seized his arm, but Wanda was immediately on guard. Together they struggled, their bodies gleaming in the fire-







light. Wanda was the heavier, but Osseo the quicker. At last, with a swift movement of his foot and a jerk of his arm, Osseo threw his tormenter heavily, and kneeling upon his breast, snatched the scalp, and held it high for a moment, in the sight of all. "Wanda has conquered the Crow," he said, "but Osseo has conquered Wanda," and whirling the scalp into the darkness, he passed into the Council tent.

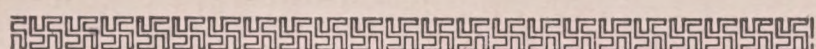
Wanda rose slowly, his face convulsed with rage. It was an insult he could never forgive.

The braves, still unwashed from the battle, sat in grave silence. Soangetaha drew Osseo in front of them all.

"Osseo," he said, "you have crossed the threshold into manhood, now two suns ago, you the son of a great warrior, Soangetaha's noble friend. You have learned the duty of a tribesman. Did you hear the drum at sunrise?"

Osseo's dry lips parted. "I heard," he answered. The warriors waited, but he said no more.

"And you understood?"



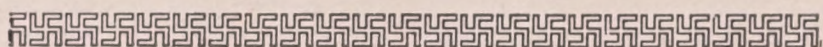
"I understood," replied Osseo.

There was silence in the tent. And then the strong chief spoke out sternly: "There is but one thing men must think—that Osseo feared the Crow—that Osseo is a coward." Osseo straightened at the word. "You know the doom of such—exile forever from all tribes, a wanderer in the wilderness, a companion of the beasts. No man would even take the scalp of such." His deep voice sank in scorn.

"But you are young, Osseo. This Council hath decided that still another sun be given you in which to prove the charge a lie. Go!" and he pointed sternly toward the door.

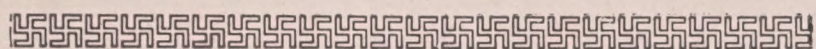
Osseo faced the circle proudly. His chin high, his arms straight by his sides. His eyes glanced boldly, freely from the face of one man to another, as if to challenge their belief. Then, bowing his head, he passed under the lifted flap, meeting in doing so, the angry eyes of Wanda, who had slipped within the tent, the scalp once more at his belt.





Outside the circle of the firelight, Osseo clenched his hands and teeth. A coward, a coward, never! The whole thing seemed outrageous; quite impossible; a horrible dream. The wind had risen, and blew strongly from the mountain, lifting back his hair, and cooling his hot face. High, high above, the moon rode calm and white.

On her bed lay his old mother, her face to the tent skins. Osseo's little brother slept by her side. Osseo threw himself upon his couch, and buried his face in Mokwa's thick hair. No one understood, his mother least of all. How foolish he had been upon the mountain peak long ago. Could He who made the blazing sun, see him a boy upon the threshold of manhood, standing on the earth? How high had reached his tiny voice, piping the praises of Manito? No, it was lost, lost in the great circle of the sky. Up there dwelt the Great Mystery, high, high above, with the blazing sun; high, high up with the calm, white riding moon, and Osseo was only a boy, after all, very lonely down upon the earth.



He had borne the torture of the earth. He had borne the torture of the threshold; alone he had faced the terrible panther without the quiver of a muscle. Now the great dry sobs shook his body, and he buried his face deep in Mokwa's shaggy coat to make no sound. Mokwa slept on. He was only a brother of the forest. Gradually the spasm passed, and worn out, Osseo slept. The wind souged through the great trees, whirled under the loose tent, and stirred the skins upon his bed.

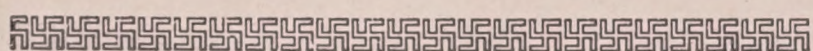
Suddenly, Osseo woke. Mokwa was moving underneath his arms. The bear lifted his head, sniffing the air of the tent. Osseo sat up. The wind was tearing through the tree tops, and puffing under the tent flap came a strong odor of smoke. Instantly Osseo was on his feet. Listening, in a lull of the wind, he distinctly heard the dry grass crackling. He knew what that meant—a forest fire from the mountain sweeping full upon them with the wind!

"Mother," he called, "the fire!





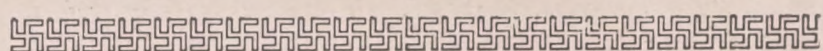
Meda



Quick!" Tearing open the tent flap he looked out. The fire was racing toward them swiftly as a man could run. Last year's grass was as dry as tinder, and the blaze carried on in great streamers, leaped ten feet sometimes, whirled from one clump of brush or grass to another. Even as he looked, it reached the tent. Then he turned and ran through the village at his greatest speed. "Fire," he shouted, "Fire," at the top of his voice, the wind fairly snatching the words from his mouth and bearing them on before him.

Instantly all was commotion. The man ran for the horses. Dogs barked. The women gathered up their babies and any household treasure they could snatch first, and ran for the little mountain stream which paralleled their street. There was barely time to reach it and plunge in up to their knees before the dry skins of their teepees were licked by the flames.

The horses, wild with fright, required all the strength and skill of the men to control them within the nar-



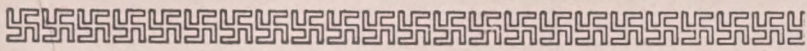
row limits of the stream. The children wailed and added their part to the din.

Suddenly, a woman cried, "Meda, old Meda is not here!" The men dragging down the horses' heads, looked up in consternation. Old Meda's teepee was farthest off, on the edge of the prairie. There he dwelt alone. The fire was racing toward it, and he so feeble he could barely walk.

Osseo heard the cry, and springing on the bank, leaped through the burning grass, till he was racing side by side with the flying sparks. He passed them and darted over the unburned ground to the old man's tent. "Meda," he panted, "Father Meda, the fire!" The old man tottered to his feet. His blood was cold, so he was fully dressed in buckskin, smooth with wear. Osseo, naked save for his clout and moccasins, which had been half burned from his feet, caught up a well dressed blanket. "Come," he urged.

Outside the tent, he placed his arm about the old man's waist and tried to lift him, but with all his strength he could not. "Hurry," he panted again,



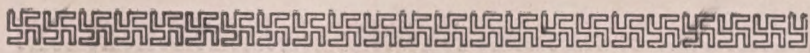


“hurry!” The fire was now upon them, the tall grass crackling about Osseo’s naked knees. The wind broke blazing branches from the bushes and dashed them against the boy’s bare shoulders and into the old man’s face. Osseo threw the blanket over Meda’s head, and using all his strength, tried to hurry him on. His hair caught fire, and he pressed it out with his free hand. His shoulders and arms were blistered, his legs were in torment. On and on he waded through the burning grass, until it seemed impossible to endure the agony longer. His mind became confused. A burning twig sailing above him in the wind, seemed to him a strange bird of the sea, come to help him, and bear him on above the earth. He began to call aloud to it for aid, when suddenly through the smoke, broke the giant form of Soangetaha. Quickly he seized the old man in his arms and rushed for the stream. “Run,” he called to Osseo. Osseo, fearing to lose them in the smoke, staggered after his chief.

The people were all gathered now in



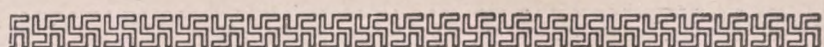
Blue Flower



the stream opposite the old man's tent. Weakly Osseo stumbled down among them in the water, his face twitching. As his naked back sank forward, from the low bank rose Wanda, his short knife gleaming in the firelight. All the people saw the motion, and Osseo saw, but could not save himself. As the knife shone high, suddenly from the shadow in the water rose a clumsy form, and a great paw felled Wanda with a stroke, the knife flying far out into the water. A shout rose from the people.

With the first streak of the dawn, the wind sank. As the light grew stronger, the braves gathered upon the warm, blackened earth. The fire had passed as quickly as it came. The wigwams were charred and blackened, and some of them still smouldered. The women stood in a disconsolate, dripping circle, and the children rubbing their eyes, looked up miserably.

On the bank lay Osseo. An old woman tenderly bathed his limbs with oil of skunk's fat, which some one had found unharmed in a ruined teepee,



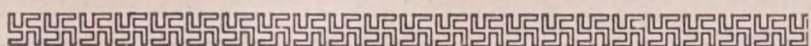
while his mother cut long thin strips from her doeskin skirt, to wrap about them. His lips were bleeding where his teeth had sunken to keep all moaning back. His head turned restlessly from side to side. Soangetaha, the chief, bent gently over him, and placing his strong arms underneath his body, lifted him up before the circle of the warriors.

"Speak, O brave men of the Suanni. Is Osseo a coward?" At the last word Osseo's body stiffened, and with a sudden movement he slipped from Soangetaha's arms and faced the men upon his own two feet. No longer did he clench his teeth upon his lips. He lifted his chin high, as in the Council tent; his arms were straight by his sides. Proudly he glanced from one to another.

"Answer, O braves of the Suanni," rang the chief's deep voice.

"No!" came the shout, and they stamped upon the earth.

A smile of happy triumph curved Osseo's lips, and then, as suddenly as the great panther had felt the sting of



his arrow, the pain swept over him again. His head sank forward, his body crumpled up, and he fell backward so swiftly that Soangetaha could not save him, and it was the arm of Blue Flower which kept that proud head from touching the earth.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022157942

